Richie Tozier Needs Love And Protection

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Richie Tozier Needs Love And Protection by bi_loser99

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Genre: Angst, Bullying, Flashbacks, Fluff and Angst, High School, I just love these boys so much, I lovethem, M/M, Panic Attacks, Reddie, So much love for the loser's club, Teen Romance, Young Love, also this fandom needs more pics so here's my attempt
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Summary:

Richie Tozier is a wildcard. ALways has and always will be. Now the Losers have to help him after his big mouth gets him in to trouble. Thanksfully, Eddie is there.

Richie Tozier Needs Love And Protection

Author's Note:

> Hey, this is my first IT 2017 and Reddie fic so be gentle.
>
> TW:
> bullying
> violence
> flashbacks/panic attacks
>
> This fic can also be found at the-hero-of-queens.tumblr.com

Richie Tozier was definitely the most unpredictable out of The Loser's Club. Most of the losers keep to their schedule and routine. Not Richie. Routine made him itch, feel like he was stuck in an endless loop of uselessness. Most of the Loser's didn't get why, but Bev got it. She was the most like Richie out of everyone. Sure she knew when and what not to say and she certainly didn't have half as bad a trash mouth, but she understood him and why he did what he did. So when Richie didn't show up to ninth period Spanish class that he shared with Bill, Stan, and Eddie, no one was concerned. Richie was known to ditch class to sneak up to the roof to smoke a few cigs with Bev when they were restless or had what Bev called "the itch". , they didn't bat an eye, maybe if they did, thing would have been different.

The boys left Spanish class, an endless stream of chatter and teasing following them as they rushed to their lockers to get their stuff and leave the school for the three day weekend. They didn't see Richie at his locker, but they still weren't concerned. On days that he ditched with Bev, he was usually the first one to their meetup spot, the bike rack. But when they got to the bike rack, they didn't see Richie or his bike. So the trio waited at the bike rack for the others. Richie could just be with Bev still. Sometimes they would stay behind to finish their stick before heading down. Mike headed over first, he had dropped off his meat delivery early so he could meet the losers at the

school. Then, Ben *and* Bev headed over, laughing about some shitty poem that a freshman wrote about their horse. Still, no Richie.

“Bev, where’s Richie?” Eddie asks, eyebrows furrowed.

“I’m not sure, he didn’t make it to ninth?” She asked, not all too concerned.

“N-N-No, he w-w-wasn’t there t-today.” Bill responds, before pecking Bev’s cheek quickly.

“Well, he probably split a while ago. We were on the roof during third period study hall and he said he was thinking of ditching for the arcade.” Bev responds, unlocking her own bike from the rack.

“Trashmouth is probably glued to Final Fight and talking smack to the other nerds that are there just as much.” Stan says, rolling his eyes.

“I don’t know guys…” Ben says, uneasy at the idea of just up and leaving without Richie.

“We should just check? With Derry, you can never be too sure.” Eddie, attempting to hide the fear in his voice. It’s only been two months since the events of the sewers.

“If I see one ‘Missing Richie Tozier’ posters I’m killing myself.” Stan

says and Eddie glares at him.

“Stan, shut up.” Eddie deadpans.

“I’m just saying, I’m not in the mood to deal with IT right now. I have an algebra ii test on Tuesday!” Stan says, following the group back into the school anyway. He won’t leave his best friend but he will sure as hell complain about it.

The searched the hallways, Richie’s locker, the roof, and even the locker room, but besides the stench, they didn’t find him. No sign of him and no signs of Pennywise. The group was relieved they didn’t find things written in blood or missing posters littered around, but they were still uneasy about not finding Richie. Something about today was just off. But, they just wrote it off as still being off after the events of the summer.

“I guess he just isn’t here?” Ben says, as they’re all stopped in the boy's locker room.

“A-At l-l-least it wasn’t I-IT.” Bill says, relieved they don’t have to deal with *that* again.

“I don’t like how he just sneaks away without a word. So many things could happen! He could be kidnapped by some creep or hit by a car and bleeding out or dead at the bottom of the Quarry and we would have no idea!” Eddie exclaims, frustrated.

“He just needs to be a little unpredictable sometimes, Eddie. Being predictable makes him anxious. Not that he would admit that, he just says it makes him itch.” Bev says, understanding where both boys were coming from.

“I guess we’ll just see him later; do you think he’ll come around to the quarry?” Mike asks.

“If he is glued to that stupid arcade game, probably not, I’ll just call him when I get home.” Stan says.

“I guess he’s just at Level Three Richie™ today. You know how he sometimes gets.” Bev says, and all the losers nod their head solemnly.

Richie was not one to show his emotions easily, another similarity between him and Bev. While the others of the group will admit when they are feeling scared or down or just generally upset, Richie will hide it for everyone.

Level One Richie ™ is the most subtle of the three levels. This usually means an increase in his “Voices” and terrible jokes. His famous trashmouth is working in overdrive; every other word out of his mouth is “fuck” or “shit” or occasionally “asshole”. When Rich was at Level One Richie ™ they knew to just let it run it;s course, and not to push him too far.

Level Two Richie ™ was a little bit worse. When he was at Level Two Richie ™ he smoked more than usual and was easier to provoke than usual. Level Two Richie ™ was brought out most by Bower’s gang and sometimes teacher. When people bothered him about his glasses, his loud mouth, his big personality, he would get hurt. Instead of showing it, he turned it outwards. Like Level One Richie

™, he cursed up a storm and didn't hold back his colorful insults.

But Level Three Richie ™ is a whole new Richie. They've only seen it a few times, and they don't like to. The first time they say Level Three Richie ™ was after their first time in the Neibolt house. Eddie wasn't there for it, Richie held it in until Eddie's mom drove away because Eddie was terrified and hurt and he didn't want to make it worse. But then Bill just had to go on and on about how they had to go back and keep going, ignoring the fact that all of them had almost died, and that if they had figured out that three doors weren't real a second later, Eddie would have been *eaten.* Richie exploded, he screamed at and pushed and shoved Bill. He had to be held back by Mike and Stan when Bill *punched him* for calling him out on his bullshit.

The second time was when Bower's gang was trailing the loser's club with his car and he was saying shit to all of them, and they all let it roll off their backs. But Richie's at like Level Two Richie ™ because he has no time for Bower's gang and he doesn't like when they say shit to his friends, so he says shit to Bowers. So, to retaliate because Bowers hates being made to look a fool, he just attacks Richie. He goes in on how no one likes Richie, not even his family, and how fucked up Rixhie's parents are. This sets Richie off and he is at full blown Level Three Richie ™, he lunges into the car, and starts dragging Bowers out of the movie car. He's punching him and just losing his shit. The losers are trying to hold him back and Bowers' gang is trying to drive off. Honestly, seeing Richie freak out like that freaked them all out, because even when he was at Level Three Richie ™ with Bill, he wasn't anywhere near as bad as *that.* Richie had to leave because he was upset and couldn't handle being near anyone, so he spent the night at the arcade.

The third time Richie is at Level Three Richie ™ is when Bowers' gang lock Eddie into a gym locker. Everyone knows Eddie hates germs, it's been ingrained into him since he was a toddler. Even after

he knows he isn't sick, it's just anxiety; the germs still freak him out. So he was freaking out and in the middle of an attack. Richie, who was coming to smoke, walked in on what was happening and once again lost his shit. Bowers' gang know that Richie is a scrawny kid they could easily pummel, but seeing that much rage is off putting at first. So, once again, it ends with Bowers' gang rushing off with vows for revenge. This time, Richie cools down quickly, more focused on helping Eddie out of the locker and to breath normally than on his own anger and frustration.

Level Three Richie ™ is not someone to mess with. They all know this. So when Richie is at Level Three Richie ™, they know to stay away and let him cool down in peace.

"L-L-Let's just h-head to t-t-the Q-Quarry." Bill says, and so the group leaves.

The group almost forgets Richie randomly disappeared earlier. They hang out at the Quarry, seeing who can throw rocks the farthest into the water, playing stupid games like tag and manhunt (aka a more adult feeling hide and seek), and just having fun. But it does feel strange that the loud and sometimes obnoxious voice of Richie wasn't talking trash and attempting his "voices" that seemed too like his own to be a real impersonation.

Eventually, they all go their separate ways for dinner, but no one forgets about the missing loser. When Stan gets back home, his mom is still finishing up dinner, so he decides to call Richie quickly to see how he was doing. The phone rang six times, almost going to his answering machine before Ms. Tozier answers the phone.

" *'Ello? Who's it? Is eighclock and 'm tryin ta watch Snoopsss."* Richie's

mom's speech is heavily slurred and it's hard for Stan to even understand.

"Uh, hi Mrs. Tozier, is Richie there? I just have a quick question?" Stan asks

" *Richieeeee, Richieeeeeeeee! The phone, Richieeee! 'm trying ta watch Snooppss Richieeee."* Richie's mom moans out Richie's name throughout the house. In the background, Stan can hear Richie's dad yelling in the background.

" *Maggie stop your screaming! It's so goddamn annoying! Kid's not here!"* Richie's dad says, making Stan furrow his brows.

" *He's na 'ere. Bye."* Mrs. Tozier mumbles out

"Well, can you tell him-" Stan is cut of by the line clicking.

"-that Stan called…" Stan mumbled the rest, but before he could think to call the others, he is called to dinner.

The next day, Richie is still MIA. Bev, Bill, and Ben all go to the arcade to see if anyone has seen Richie since friday. No one has, the last time anyone saw him was in school on Friday. They leave the arcade more frustrated than they had been when they arrived. Eddie, Stan, and Mike have insufficient results. They all went to the movies, if Richie wasn't at the arcade or with them, he was at the movies. They had a student discount so instead of paying four dollars per

movie, he only had to pay a dollar. But, the clerks said that they hadn't seen him at the theater since Wednesday. They didn't understand where Richie would be, even after being at Level Three Richie ™, he would be fine after a day. It was unusual for him to simply drop off the face of the earth.

Thankfully, it was Saturday. Saturdays were the Loser's Clubs favorite night. That was when they had their weekly movie night. The person who got to pick the movies rotated on a weekly basis. They would rent three tapes and everyone had to watch no matter what. They would make a ton of buttery popcorn, eat a ton of candy, and drink soda until their stomachs ached. They would all sleepover Bill's house, who had the biggest living room and whose parents were glad the house was filled with sound again. They always had a ton of fun. They would play truth or dare and never have I ever and had over the top pillow fights.

So, they all, one by one, arrived at Bill's house by seven. The last one to get there was Mike, since he lived the furthest from Bill's house. They waited for Richie, assuming he was running late. As the time passed, however, they got more and more concerned. They waited in silence, the chattered had slowly died out as time went on and their worry grew, for two and a half hours. By 9:30, Richie still hadn't shown up. Never once, no matter what mood Richie had been in, has Richie missed a movie night. It just simply wasn't allowed; their movie nights were sacred.

"Okay, I'm freaking the fuck out now!" Eddie yells, startling everyone.

"He's never missed a movie night! Even when Bowers threw his bike into the barrens, he made it to movie night. I don't get it…" Ben responds.

“Something about this just seems…off?” Mike adds.

“Richie wouldn’t just up and ditch us.” Bev says with certainty.

“I tried calling his house yesterday, when I got home for dinner. His parents said he wasn’t home before they hung up on me.”

“You don’t think-” Ben starts to say before Bill cuts him off.

“N-N-No, i-it can’t be.” Bill says, and no one thinks to question it.

“Well, then where the hell is he? No one has seen him at the arcade or the movie theater or at home!” Eddie yells, the conversation only making him more frustrated and scared for Richie.

“Maybe we missed something at the school. There could be like clues to where he could be that we missed because we were too busy trying to prove it wasn’t IT.” Bev says.

“W-W-Well, w-w-we can’t go n-now. My p-p-parents w-w-would be p-p-pissed. W-We’ll go in t-t-the morning.” Bill declares, and the group nods.

Bill was right, they can’t do anything now. They try to watch the movies that Stan had brought, but no one could get into it. They were

all off and on edge, worrying about Richie. Eventually, they all fell into light and restless sleeps only to wake up at nine in the morning, all ready to find their friend. It's Bill's idea to visit Richie's before heading into the school; it was on the way and it couldn't hurt to try. They all stood on Richie's sketchy porch that looked as if the rotting wood was going to give out at any second. Richie's dad answered the door, and as soon as the door opened, the stench of booze and cigarettes and BO and vomit hit them like a brick wall. The blinked quickly to fight off the stinging in their eyes, but tried to remain as neutral as possible as to not upset the temperamental Went Tozier.

"Hello, Mr. Tozier! We were wondering if Richie was around?" Bev says, using her sweetest voice, the one she uses to manipulate adults.

"You want the kid? I have no clue if he's here." Mr. Tozier says with a scowl.

"Maggie! Have you seen the kid?" Mr. Tozier yells over his shoulder to the woman slumped over at the dining room table, a bottle of vodka to her left.

"Went shut up with all the yelling! I've got a migraine that's killing me. How should I know where the kid went? Not my problem." Mrs. Tozier says before she pours herself a glass and knocks it back.

"When you find him, tell him he owes me cigarettes, he was supposed to pick them up yesterday." Mr. Tozier says, and before the kids could say anything else, he slams the door.

"Wow. Just wow." Mike says

“I knew they were asshole but…” Ben adds

“What the fuck was that?” Eddie says, obviously pissed.

It wasn’t a secret that Richie didn’t have the best home life, but terrible. His parents didn’t even notice or care Richie was missing for two days. This only made the losers want to find him more. They remembered the fear on his face in the Neibolt house when he saw the missing poster. So, they quickly rode their bikes over to the school, all of them sending out a silent prayer that this whole thing was one elaborate prank orchestrated by Richie and they can all punch him in the arm for it. But, it wasn’t like Richie to scare them like this, maybe a jump scare or something, but nothing that would remotely remind them of IT.

So, once again they searched the halls and the classrooms and roof. But, once again, there was not a single trace of Richie anywhere. His bike wasn’t locked to the bike rack and nothing looked out of the ordinary. The losers were at a loss.

“Where could he be?” Ben says.

“This doesn’t make any sense. Where else would he be?” Mike adds.

“We’re missing something…” Bev says, her brows her furrowed.

“What was the last place anyone saw him?” Stan asks and they all take a moment to think.

“K-Kristen Mc-c-cCall saw him in p-p-painting class fifth p-p-period?” Bill says, but Eddie shakes his head.

“No, Larry Johnson saw him go into the locker room after gym eighth period. That’s the last time anyone saw him, since he didn’t show up to Spanish ninth period.” Eddie says, figuring it out.

They all rush to the boy's locker room, and once again the smell hits them like a brick wall, except this time it’s so much worse than it had been on Friday. It smelt like a terrible mix of BO, piss, and trash. They’re eyes widened in horror; what the hell happened?

“What the-” Stan starts but Eddie shushed him quickly.

“Quiet, I hear something!” Eddie whispers and they all go dead silent.

At first they think they’re imagining it, but then they realize they’re hearing ragged breathing and the sound of someone lightly hitting a locker door. Their eyes widen and they begin to frantically search for the source of the noise. Of course the locker room had to be huge, and each locker smelt terrible, so it was hard to figure out which one was the one they were looking for.

“Richie?”

“Richie, where are you?”

“Come on, Richie, talk to us!”

“Guys, over here!” Ben yells, and all the losers flock over to him.

They stare in horror at the locker. It big black lettering reads “Bucky Beaver”, the sounds of harsh breathing and shaking is louder. The terrible smell of piss and trash is much stronger than at the door, and it’s making all their eyes water, Stan is even holding his nose.

“I tried to open it, but it’s locked!” Ben says, his voice panicked.

“How are we supposed to get him out? The janitors don’t come until tomorrow!” Eddie yells and he swears his stomach is made of ice. They need to get Richie out of there now. They *have* to.

“I got it!” Bev says, pulling out the bobby pins holding her curls out of her eyes.

They all sit for what feels like hours, waiting anxiously as Bev goes to town on the lock. She twists and pulls and pushes the pins inside the lock, they’d probably be impressed if they weren’t so terrified. After what was probably less than a minute, they hear the lock pop and Bv pulls open the locker door to a heartbreaking sight.

Inside the locker was Richie. He was covered in what looks like multiple trash bags worth of garbage. He stunk of piss, obviously from being stuck inside the locker for over 48 hours. His already pale skin looked almost see through, so pale as if someone drained him of all his blood. His breathing was coming out ragged and shallow. He had duct tape covering his mouth and it looked like his hands were bound behind his back. The sight broke all the loser's hearts, making them want to cry. Stan had tears pooling in his eyes, and Eddie could feel his own eyes stinging with unshed tears.

They all froze for a moment, not knowing what to do, how to approach this. It was obvious that Richie was freaking the fuck out, but so were they. Bill was the first to approach, as the not-so-unofficial leader of The Loser's Club it made sense he was the first to approach.

"R-R-Richie, w-why don't y-y-you g-g-get out of the l-l-locker." Bill says, reaching out to help Richie out of the locker, but it only made things worse.

Riche burrowed himself deeper in the locker, desperate to get away from Bill. He also began to scream, they were muffled by the duck tape but it didn't help calm his friends down.

Bev tries next, her and Richie had gotten close since she joined The Loser's Club. She thought that she might get through to him. But like the Bill, she failed too.

"Richie, calm down. It's us!" Bev yelled, but Richie's screams only got louder. He seemed to be yelling something but it was impossible to tell with the duck tape. Eddie wanted to cry just looking at him.

Next, Stan decided to try. Stand and Richie had been friends since they were kids, their parents had been friendly when they still bothered to go to temple, before they stopped bothering to keep up appearances, and pushed the two boys together.

“Richie, listen, it’s just your-” Stan got as close as the in front of the locker, a hand on Richie’s arm when Richie got even worse.

Richie kicked Stan away, slamming him into the lockers across from the one he was in. He had started to cry, fresh tear tracks joining the dried ones on his face. Mike grabbed Stan off the floor and helped him up, they all looked terrified, unsure how to help Richie without getting hurt.

They can all clearly see on his face, that Richie has no idea what is going on. It looks like he doesn’t realize it ’s them and not whoever put him in the locker. His eyes have a look eerily like Bev’s when IT put that weird fear spell on her. Richie’s breathing was getting worse, if he didn’t calm down soon, he was going to pass out.

Eddie looked at Richie and could feel his heartbreaking. Here was Richie, who did everything for his friends, even standing up to a child-eating evil demon clown multiple times, is having a full fledged panic attack. Suddenly, Eddie is struck with an idea. Eddie has panic attacks all the time! It was the actual source of his “asthma”, he knew exactly how to handle this.

“Guys, back up! I know what to do!” Eddie whispers loud enough for the losers to hear but not to startle Richie anymore.

“Richie, it’s your friends. It’s just us, you’re safe.” Eddie says in a voice softer than the losers had ever heard, slowly making his way to the side of the locker instead of in front of it.

“Richie, it’s Eddie. You’re okay now, it’s going to be okay. You’re safe. We’re not going to hurt you. We’re gonna help you.” Eddie continues to soothe Richie; he doesn’t touch him or overwhelm him at all. He simply speaks softly.

The best part is it’s working. Richie’s breathing is starting to slow a bit, not fully to where they were comfortable, but he didn’t seem like he’d pass out any second. He also stopped screaming, just seeming to mumble something under the tape.

“You’re okay, Richie. The whole Loser’s Club is here to help. We’re all here. You’re safe now, we got you. I got you Richie.” Eddie says, and Richie’s eyes seem to clear and not look so much like a cornered animal.

“Richie, you’re going to be okay. Can I take the tape off your mouth, Richie?” Eddie asks and while Richie doesn’t say anything, he doesn’t react.

Eddie decides to take a chance and slowly pulled off the tape, mostly slick from Richie’s spit. Richie doesn’t lash out or panic, only starts to breathe out of his mouth.

“Richie, we’re all here with you. I’m gonna need you to try and calm down you’re breathing. You’re safe, okay.” Eddie says, trying to get Richie out of his panic attack, but it doesn’t seem to work on helping

his breathing.

“Okay, Richie you’re still struggling with your breathing. I have something that can help you breathe better. Do you want to try ?” Eddie asks, the rest of the loser simply watch the interaction.

At first, Richie doesn’t respond, and Eddie worries Richie is still too far in his head, but then he nods stiffly.

“Okay, we’re gonna use my inhaler. I’m gonna hold it for you. All you have to do is breath in when I count to three, okay? Can you do that for me, Richie?” Eddie asks, and Richie nods again, taking less time to process.

Eddie pulls out his inhaler out of his fanny pack, now using it for anxiety instead of actual asthma. He pulls off the cap and softly places it between Richie’s lips, not wanting to startle him and cause him to revert to his panic.

“Okay, on three Richie. One... Two... Three.” Eddie says, and he pushes on the inhaler as Richie breathes in the puff.

After he breathes it in, Richie’s wide eyes shut and Eddie puts away the inhaler. Richie’s breath calms down and he starts to breathe normally.

“Good job, Richie. Now, do you want to get out of the locker? I’ll help get your hands free. You’re safe here. All your friends are here,

okay.” Eddie says, and Richie opens his eyes, much more alert than before but still full of tears, and nods his head.

Eddie lightly grabs Richie’s bicep and leads him out of the locker, making sure to keep his visual field clear so he doesn’t feel trapped. Richie steps onto the floor, his legs shaking violently. It’s only then that they realize he’s been standing for *days* . Eddie realizes Richie isn’t going to last longer standing.

“Riche, why don’t you sit that why you don’t pass out and rest your legs.” Richie nods and Eddie helps him to the floor without him collapsing.

Now that Richie is sitting, they can see his hands tightly bound with more duct tape behind his band. His hands are blood red from him struggling against the tape, and Eddie can even see some blood were the tape chafed his skin. If he wasn’t set on helping Richie he’d find who did this (even though he was a strong idea who it was) and kill them himself.

Bev hands him her pocket knife, and he doesn’t even question it, saving that for later. It just gently cuts off the tape, making sure not to accidently nick Richie. Once he pulls off the tape, he places Richie’s hands in his lap. It’s then that Richie understands what’s going on.

“Guys?” His voice cracks and sounds like he’s going to lose it.

“We’re here Richie.” They say, matching their pitch to Eddies.

“Do you think you can ride on the back of my bike till we get to Bill’s house?” Eddie asks, thankfully that he let Richie talk him into putting pegs on the back of his bike for “a coolness upgrade”.

Richie nods his head, but he makes no moves to stand. He looks hesitant and it breaks Eddie’s heart, he’s scared to even go with his friends.

“It’s okay, Richie. You’re safe.” Eddie says, and Richie peels his gaze away from his throbbing hands to Eddie. Eddie has a soft smile on his without any menace or mischief. So Richie nods again and Eddie gets the message.

Eddie gently lifts Richie off the ground, wrapping his arm over Eddie shoulder. Eddie may have been shorter than Richie, he could still support his weight. They exit the school quietly, Eddie and Richie lag behind the others, but Richie doesn’t seem to mind.

The bike rides over to Bill’s house feels way too long and way too short for Eddie’s liking. On one hand, he wants to get Richie cleaned up and feed and take care of Richie. He wants Richie to relax and sleep and just feel better. However, Eddie is reveling in how tight Richie is holding onto his shoulders while standing on the pegs. His body flush against Eddie back. He has a slight tremble and he grips Eddie as if he would slip away if he eased up. Eddie didn’t care about the trash and piss and germs the boy is covered in because he’s just so damn close. He feels guilty that he is enjoying this while Richie is freaking out and in pain, but he pushes that away for now.

Once at Bill’s house, they have to treat Richie like a scared and injured animal as to not trigger another panic attack. Eddie coaxes him to use the bathroom while Bill gets spare clothes for him to

wear. Eddie waits outside the bathroom door like he promised. Bill hands Eddie the clothing and joins the others downstairs, giving Richie his space. Eddie is content on just waiting outside the door until Richie is done using the bathroom and showering until Richie speaks.

“E-Eds, can you come in?” Richie asks and his voice is uncharacteristically soft that for a moment, Eddie thinks this must be a clone. But he shakes that idea from his head and enters the bathroom. Richie is standing in front of the shower in just his underwear, he looks uneasy and like he is afraid of what Eddie is going to say.

It takes all Eddie’s willpower to not gasp. Richie’s underweight frame was littered with nasty purple bruises. He was fiddling with his fingers and refusing to look Eddie in the eyes.

“Are you okay, Richie? Do you need me to do something?” Eddie asks gently and can coax an answer out of Richie.

“Can you… Can you stay in the bathroom while I shower? I don’t want to be alone…” Richie answers, his voice is heavy with shame.

“Of course Richie. I’ll wait right here with your change of clothes. It’s not a problem.” He responds, and Richie lets out a breath he must have been holding.

Richie turns his back to Eddie and turns on the hot water for the shower. After giving it a moment to warm him, he turns just a fraction to see if Eddie was looking at him only to see he was staring at the door with a bright red blush on his face matching Richie’s own. Riche quickly finishes stripping and enters the warm shower. He lets

out a quiet little moan at the soothing feeling if the water on his tense, aching muscles that makes Eddie's own blush deepen.

Richie spends a long time in the shower, scrubbing his scalp with Bill's mom's fancy shampoo and condition, making his hair smell like strawberries. He scrubs his body with a body soup that smells like vanilla, and after a few rinses and repeat cycles, he smells like strawberries and cream. The smell of trash and pee is gone, even Eddie can't smell it in the bathroom anymore. He uses the extra toothbrush that Bill gave him and scrubs his teeth three times. He normally isn't this intense with his hygiene, but being in that disgusting locker made him feel so gross. It took longer for him to feel normal again.

Finally, after an hour, Richie finally turned off the shower water and grabbed the soft towel from the rack. When Eddie sees this, he places the clothing, a soft, baggy sweater that may have been Bev's and a pair of shorts that may have been Eddie's. After so many sleepovers, Bill had a collection of the losers' clothes piling up in his room. His mom washed and folded them but they always forgot to take them home with them again. Eddie once again stared at the door, not wanting to invade Richie's privacy, sure he's since him naked and in his underwear before, but Richie was so vulnerable now.

"I'm good." Richie said quietly, and Eddie looked up and choked a bit on his spit.

Bev's gray sweater was big on Richie, she was taller and was actually a healthy weight. The sleeves were past his fingertips and the collar hung loose, exposing his pale collarbones. The shorts, which were Eddie's, were also loose on him, having been old and stretched out from trying to clean it himself and doing it wrong. Eddie's mind short circuited at the sight. Richie looked so soft and cuddly that Eddie just

wanted to hug him so tight, scared he'd slip away. But now was *not* the time for that, Eddie. Richie is looking for help from a *friend* . Get it together. He catches his breath and stands up.

"The other losers said they'd make you some food while you showered. You must be starving." Eddie says, helping Richie down the stairs, still weak.

"Yeah." Richie says softly, not making a joke to go along with it. Eddie frowns, wishing his friend could just be fine. But that's not how the world works.

When they get downstairs, both of them are surprised by the set up the losers made while Richie showered. On the couch was a huge nest of soft blankets and puffy pillows. On the coffee table was a bowl of soup and a mug. Bev was holding the boombox, playing one of her many mixtapes. Riche just gapes at the sight, and Eddie must whisper for him to sit.

"I know it's not much, but we thought it'd help." Bev says softly.

"I made a blanket nest so it 's comfortable." Mike says, his smile was so sweet it gave Eddie a cavity.

"I made some soup on the stovetop, it's just chicken noodle, but it's my favorite." Ben adds pointing to the bowl.

"I made some of my mom's tea that she makes whenever I'm sick. It

tastes good and makes you feel a million times better.” Stan says, and Richie and Eddie can smell the sweet tea from the couch.

“And I’m playing the mixtape I listen to when I’m upset. It helps a lot when I’m in a bad mood and I know you like these songs.” Bev says, and Richie has a small smile on his face.

“Thanks guys. This means a lot.” Rich says.

“D-Don’t w-w-worry about it.” Bill says.

Eddie starts to move towards the kitchen but Richie’s head snaps towards him.

“Where are you going?” Richie asks, fear in his eyes breaking Eddie’s heart.

“I’m just going to get some stuff to clean your wrists from the kitchen. They’ll get infected if you leave them.” Eddie says, guilty to leave for just a few seconds but Richie nods.

Eddie returns in record time and gets to work disinfected and wrapping Richie’s wrists and hands with gauze. He works in silence, and besides the soft music playing in the background, no one speaks. They don’t know what to say. They want to ask what happened, but they don’t want to get Richie worked up again. Eddie goes to stand and give Richie room when he finishes but Richie grabs his shirt sleeve and tugs, pulling Eddie closer. They’re full on cuddling now,

and Richie doesn't care and Eddie can't seem to make himself. It doesn't matter that all their friends are there because Richie is holding Eddie and Eddie is holding Richie and Richie *wants* Eddie to hold him and he *wants* to hold Eddie.

Bev, being the most blunt and brave of them all, breaks the silence and asks what they all are desperate to know.

"Richie, we don't want to scare you, but what happened."

Richie's eyes widen slightly, but he doesn't panic. He takes a deep breath, before starting his story.

"Well, it was after gym class…"

Richie was glad gym glass was over, he hated gym. He got all sweaty and out of breath easily and he'd rather be in math class or Spanish. He was good at those subjects. Sure, he got A's in gym, but it was a lot more work and none of the other losers were in this class.

He stayed behind to help his gym teacher clean up the gym so he could wait it out till the locker room was empty. He entered the locker room, and when he saw it was empty, he opened up his locker and pulled out a cigarette, lighting it and taking a drag. The main reason he hated this class was the fact that he shared it with-

"Well, well, well, if it isn't little Bucky Beaver!" Patrick Bowers says in Richie's ear, causing him to jump up and drop his cigarette.

Riche is grabbed by two of Henry's goons, Vic and Belch, who twist his arms behind his back. Henry's other followers, Peter, Moose, and Gard circle around, blocking any means of escape for Richie. Fuck.

"How you feeling now, Bucky Beaver?" Henry asks, his voice dripped with maliciousness.

"I was doing better before your ugly fucking face showed up!" Richie retorts, earning him a punch to the gut.

"Do you think you can run your mouth right now?" Henry yells, punching Richie again.

"Well, your mom seemed to enjoy my mouth last night!" Richie yelled again, only adding to the blows.

"Do you forget who you're talking to?" Henry says, his gang laughing and egging him on.

"I can never forget you're ugly fucking face, Bowers!" Richie yells again, unable to hold back the words.

"You just can't help that trashmouth of yours can you? Well, maybe this'll teach you to keep it shut!" Bowers yells, and Moose pulls a roll of silver duct tape from his bag.

"Wait, what are you doing? Stop!" Richie screams but is cut off by tape

covering his mouth painfully.

“This is gonna teach you how to play nice with others, Bucky Beavers!” Bowers tapes Richie’s hands together, shoving him into his open locker.

“Don’t worry, we have more! Time for the finishing touches!” Bowers yells, and without Richie realizing being too caught up in being taped up, the others now had bags of trash.

They dumped all the trash on Richie, not giving him time to see or breath. Before he could react, the locker door is shut, locking Richie inside.

“Have a wonderful weekend pissing your smartass in that disgusting locker, Tozier!” Bowers yells, but Richie doesn’t hear him. Bowers slammed the locker and smacked Richie’s head, causing him to pass out.

When Richie woke up it was dark in the locker, almost no light was flooding in from the slights near Richie’s eyes. Richie desperately had to piss, but he wouldn’t pee in his pants and let Bowers win. God, he prayed someone came and got him, and soon. But seeing how dark it was, it must be after school. Oh god, Richie thought, I’m stuck her all night! His stomach was grumbling, he hadn’t eaten since lunch and it was getting to him.

Hours passed before the pain was too much for Richie. His legs were shaking violently, if he had the room they would give out. His head was pounding and his body was aching. He couldn’t do it anymore, he couldn’t hold it. He cried violently, his sobs muffled by the tape, as he pissed himself, urine running down his leg and staining his pants. He was mortified. He almost wished no one would find him because he didn’t

want anyone to know he had pissed her fucking pants.

The hours passed slow. Richie had no idea how long he'd been in the locker. Surely, his parent's realized he never came home and were looking, right? Someone had to be coming any minute.

By the next night, he was terrified. His stomach was cramping so hard he was crying. He was so thirsty, his mouth was as dry as sand. He had given up on holding back from peeing, the damage was done. His memory was muddled, he couldn't tell where he was or how or anything. When he heard voice, in the back of his mind, he started to freak out. They were coming back to torture him more. God, they were back! When the locker popped open, he didn't see who it was, not really.

In the distance, he could hear something, a soothing voice. It reminded him of Eddie. But it got louder and louder, closer and it was Eddie. He opened his eyes, and he could see his Eddie was standing there next to locker and he could breathe again.

By the time Richie had finished his story, the soup and tea and glass of water were finished and tear tracks covered his face. Eddie tightened his grip on Richie, which made him calm down a bit, feel safer.

"God, Richie, we're so sorry! We went looking for you but we couldn't find you! We should have come sooner!" Eddie says, feeling guilty they didn't try harder to find him.

All the losers were upset, damn Bowers hurt one of their own. He was going to wish he never messed with the losers. They were all holding

back tears, not wanting to upset Richie anymore, who continued to cry.

“I-It’s okay, guys. I probably didn’t help by egging him on.” Richie said in between his crying. And for the first time, Richie did look like he was ashamed of his big mouth.

“Doesn’t matter if you made a dumb mom joke. Bowers’ gang are shitheads!” Mike says.

Richie nods, barely able to keep his eyes open. He was clearly exhausted and crying was helping.

“Thanks guy, you are the best.” Richie yawns out and Eddie continues to rub his back.

“R-Richie, w-w-why don’t y-y-you go s-s-s-sleep in the guest b-bed. T-T-There’s no w-w-way y-you’re going h-h-home like t-t-that.” Bill says with a smile and Richie nods his head slowly.

Eddie helps him stand and leads him upstairs to the spare bedroom. The bed was piled with blankets and Eddie tucked Richie into all of them. Once Richie was in the bed, Eddie goes to go back downstairs, but Richie grabs the sleeve of his sweater again.

“P-Please stay.” Richie asks, not wanting to be alone.

“S-Sure.” Eddie says reluctantly climbing in bed with Richie.

They’re silent for a moment, both hesitating, before Eddie decides to be bold.

He gently throws an arm around Richie, just above the waist. Rich signs softly, cuddling further into Eddie.

Eddies realized his feelings months ago. He was questioning what his feeling for Richie were for weeks before the summer of 1989. But he was sure of it *after* what happened. When IT started to come out of the projector, Richie had pulled him up and away from the screen, closer to him. He was terrified, but felt a fraction better because he wasn’t alone. When they were in Neibolt House, and IT was about to kill him and Richie and Bill entered the room, he thought *well shit, we’re gonna die and I never even told Richie I like him* . The thought surprised him, but he knew it was true. When IT was about the kill them, his arm on fire, when he was terrified and confused and hurt, and Richie pulled his gaze away from the monster and onto him, cradling his face, he knew. He felt safer, he knew exactly how he felt. He wanted to kiss him. He had never really thought about someone, but he had to hold back from kissing Richie because Richie doesn’t feel the same and he didn’t want their first kiss to be in a disgusting demon house with an evil child eating demon clown about to eat them.

But after that, he just knew that he loved Richie. Well, a fourteen year old’s version of love. To truly love Richie, he’d have to *be* with him. But the love was still there. And sure, people all around, especially gay people were dying of AIDs and that scared him. But when he learned he was never sick and everything he’d been so afraid of was bullshit, he decided he won’t let fear hold him back.

Eddie looked at Richie, his hair was soft and curling. His skin was clean, and from this close he could see the smattering of freckles across his cheeks. Were his eyelashes always that long? They reminded him of girls in his class when they wore makeup. For a moment, Eddie couldn't breathe. Then Richie spoke.

"I left part of the story out." Richie whispers, stirring Eddie from his thoughts of Richie.

"Do you want to tell me? You don't have to." Eddie says, not wanting Richie to feel pressured.

"When I was trapped inside that locker, I felt like I was back in Neibolt house." Riche says, his voice shaking.

"You're safe, Richie. We're never going back there." Eddie responds, soothingly rubbing soft circles on Richie's back.

"I know, but I felt so real. Like I was there. I could see the coffin filled with missing posters and a corpse me. I could see all the terrifying clown statues and dolls. It felt so *real.* I was so scared no one would notice I was missing..." Richie says, his eyes filling with tears again.

"Richie, that will never happen again. You won't ever go missing while we're around. That thing is never coming back. I promise, I'll keep you safe."

Eddie blushes, realizing he said I'll keep you safe and no we. But he doesn't regret it. The

Small smile and light blush on Richie's cheeks are worth it.

"Thanks, Eds." Richie responds, finally letting his eyes shut and cuddling deeper in Eddie's chest.

After a few minutes, they both fall asleep, tangled in each other's arms. Thankfully the both sleep soundly, neither boy having nightmares. They wake up a couple hours later, still cuddled together. Eddie wakes up first. He rubs his eyes a bit and looks at Richie. He looks much more relaxed and well rested than before. He wasn't as pale, his cheeks maintaining their warm color. Eddie didn't realize that Richie woke up until his voice, thick with sleep and still a bit hoarse surprised him.

"Enjoying the view?" Richie asks, a soft smile breaking out on his voice. Eddie blushes.

"Enjoying the cuddles?" Eddie retorts, but it's shot down by Richie.

"Very much so, actually. You're very warm and soft." Richie rubs his head against Eddie's chest to emphasize his point and they both laugh softly.

Uh, thanks for everything, Eds. I was a mess before, and I needed you. So, thanks for helping me and just for being the you that I love." RIchie says, looking Eddie in the eyes to convey his honesty and meaning.

Eddie's heart skips a beat, he wished those words were meant in the way he wanted them too. He was too oblivious to realize they did.

"Uh, it's no problem, Richie. I'd always do it for you." Eddie says, not understanding.

Their faces were so closer, Eddie could feel Richie's breath on his face. Why hadn't he realized just how close they were. Richie was looking Eddie right in the eyes, and Eddie couldn't bear to look away. Eddie thinks he sees Richie glance at his lips for a moment before looking him in the eyes again.

"Kiss me."

Eddie barely hears it. He half thinks it was just in his head. No, Richie just asked him to kiss him. He actually asked *him* to kiss him. He must be dreaming.

"W-What?" Eddie sputters out, his voice also barely above a whisper.

"Kiss me, Eddie. Please? I've been waiting for this since I was like, ten." Richie says, his face so open and vulnerable. Eddie leans in and pressed their lips together.

In all the romance books and movie, they describe it like fireworks or electricity. That's bullshit. This kiss feels nothing like that. Their lips

are a little dry, definitely not enough spit. Eddie didn't tilt his head quiet enough so their noses are pressed together. Neither one of them know how they're supposed to move their mouths so they just change the amount of pressure and don't think. It's so much more than fireworks. It's so much better than electricity. They feel like sunshine has pooled in their stomachs. Bright and soft and warm. Eddie has a hand holding Richie's waist gently, not entirely sure if his hand was supposed to go there. Richie is cupping his cheek, just like he was in Neibolt House, but this was much better.

It felt like hours, but in all reality was about ten seconds, they broke apart. Richie has the softest smile and the brightest eyes he's ever seen. He can feel the smile stretching across his own face, it should be painful but all he feels is amazing. They both go to speak at the same time.

"Eds, do you wan-" Richie says at the same time Eddie says,

"Richie, can we-"

They both stop and laugh. THey laugh because it's finally happening. It's mutual and amazing and wow. Once they finally catch their breath, Eddie takes the leap.

"Richie, do you want to go out? Like, be boyfriends?" Eddie asks, he is happy and not afraid of the answer for once.

"Oh my god, yes, Eds. Definitely." Richie can't help the blush and smile.

They both smile, and quickly kiss again. This one is just as amazing and even a bit better logistically. They pull away, not going more than a few seconds and Richie speaks again.

“I guess I’ll have to end things with your mom.” Richie says and Eddie barks out a laugh.

“Oh my god, Richie shut up!” Eddie says again and they both laugh.

“I don’t know if she’ll survive the heartache.”

“Richie!” neither one of them stop laughing.

Author's Note:

> I hope you guys liked this! IT was a lot of fun to write and I just love these kids so much!
>
> Check out my tumblr for updates on other fics and news
>
> the-hero-of-queens.tumblr.com